

PHIL 3140: Epistemology



0.5 credit. Fundamental issues concerning the relation between evidence, rationality, and knowledge. Topics may include: skepticism, the nature of belief, the structure of justification, the relative contributions of reason and sense experience to knowledge, innate knowledge, the problem of induction, and the knowledge of other minds. Precludes additional credit for PHIL 2300. Prerequisite(s): 0.5 credit in philosophy and third-year standing in a philosophy program or permission of the department.

Winter 2023
Tuesdays & Thursdays
2:35—3:55 p.m.
2104 Canal Building

Dr. David Matheson
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Overview & objective

This course is an advanced introduction to epistemology. After some preliminary considerations about the concept of knowledge on which epistemology focuses, we will look at a traditional analysis of knowledge that stretches all the way back to Plato, and a famous problem for that analysis known as the Gettier problem. This will then lead us to a discussion of various philosophical perspectives on epistemic justification, which is a core element of knowledge according to the traditional analysis.

In the latter part of the course, we will then consider a number of topics that are intimately related to these views on knowledge and justification, including the internalist-externalist divide, philosophical skepticism, epistemic circularity, the problem of the criterion, the concept of a priori (or distinctively reason-based) justification, the challenge of naturalized epistemology to the a priori and previous ways of doing epistemology, the importance of testimony as a source of knowledge, and how we ought to respond to disagreement with our epistemic peers.

There are two main objectives to this course. The first, most obvious objective is to provide you with a comprehensive understanding of epistemology's fundamental issues. The second objective, no less important than the first, is to develop your capacities for critical and creative thought about those issues.

Textbook

The following required textbook will inform our discussions in this course:

Lemos, N. (2021). *An introduction to the theory of knowledge (second edition)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This textbook is available for purchase at the University Bookstore (ground floor, University Centre; <https://www.bkstr.com/carletonstore>). Readings from the textbook that correspond to the material covered in the lectures are referred to in the right column of the Schedule below.

In the lectures I will sometimes emphasize certain articles and texts other than the textbook. These additional works will not be required reading, but because they may be useful to you as you think about what we've discussed, I will provide access to them via Brightspace.

Evaluation

In-class tests (2x35% = 70% of overall grade). There will be two in-class tests in the course, each consisting of multiple-choice and brief essay-style questions. The first will be on February 9, the second on March 23.

Term paper (30% of overall grade). In lieu of a formal final examination, you will also be expected to write a term paper of approximately eight to ten pages (2,400 to 3,000 words) in length. The topic options for the paper will be posted on Brightspace shortly after our final class. The paper will be due electronically by 11:59 p.m. of the last day of the term's examination period, April 27.

Schedule

Jan 10 & 12	<i>Preliminary considerations</i> the general concept of knowledge • varieties of knowledge and the importance of propositional knowledge • the traditional analysis of knowledge and the concepts of belief, truth, and epistemic justification	Lemos, ch. 1
Jan 17 & 19	<i>The Gettier problem</i> how the problem challenges the traditional analysis • approaches to dealing with the problem: no false grounds, defeasibility, and causal considerations • the specter of unanalyzable knowledge	Lemos, ch. 2
Jan 24 & 26	<i>Foundationalist perspectives on justification</i> basic beliefs and the regress argument • classical foundationalism	Lemos, ch. 3

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • modest foundationalism • on the justification of basic beliefs 	
Jan 31 & Feb 2	<p><i>Coherentist perspectives on justification</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> objections to foundationalism the nature of coherence some varieties of coherentism worries about coherentism 	Lemos, ch. 4
Feb 7 & 9	<p><i>Reliabilist and virtue-theoretic perspectives on justification</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the reliabilist perspective the generality problem and other worries about reliabilism the virtue-theoretic perspective as an improvement on reliabilism <p>Test 1: Feb 9</p>	Lemos, ch. 5
Feb 14 & 16	<p><i>Internalism and externalism in epistemology</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The internalist–externalist divide in epistemology how to understand the internal internalist worries about externalism 	Lemos, ch. 6
Feb 21 & 23	Winter break	
Feb 28 & Mar 2	<p><i>Epistemic circularity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing whether our faculties are trustworthy and the problem of circularity Alston’s response to the problem Sosa’s response to the problem 	Lemos, ch. 7
Mar 7 & 9	<p><i>Philosophical skepticism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> skepticism about the external world Moorean, relevant alternatives, contextualist, and abductive responses skepticism about induction 	Lemos, ch. 8
Mar 14 & 16	<p><i>The problem of the criterion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a problem for how we should approach epistemological inquiry 	Lemos, ch. 9

	skeptical, methodist, and particularist responses to the problem	
Mar 21 & 23	<p><i>The a priori</i> empiricism, rationalism, and the concept of a priori justification • strong and modest a priori justification • how the a priori relates to the analytic-synthetic distinction</p> <p>Test 2: Mar 23</p>	Lemos, ch. 10
Mar 28 & 30	<p><i>Naturalized epistemology</i> radical and limited varieties of naturalism in epistemology • the implications of naturalized epistemology for the a priori and previous ways of doing epistemology</p>	Lemos, ch. 11
Apr 4 & 6	<p><i>Testimony and disagreement</i> the nature and importance of testimony as a source of knowledge • reductionism and non-reductionism about testimony • disagreement among epistemic peers • three views on such disagreement: the equal weight view, the steadfast view, and the total evidence view</p>	Lemos, ch. 12
Apr 11	Review	
Apr 27	Term paper due	

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2022-23)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this coming year.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EDC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Important Dates:

Sept. 7	Classes start.
Sept. 20	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 10	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 24-28	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 25	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 9	Last day of fall term classes. Classes follow a Monday schedule. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 10-22	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 22	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 9	Classes begin.
Jan. 20	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 20	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 20-24	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses.
Mar. 29	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 7	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 12	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Classes follow a Friday schedule. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 13-14	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 15-27	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 27	All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:
www.carleton.ca/philosophy
 520-2110

Registrar's Office:
www.carleton.ca/registrar
 520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:
www.carleton.ca/academicadvising
 520-7850

Writing Services:
<http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>
 520-3822

MacOdrum Library
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>
 520-2735